

Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing: Governor's Proposed Budget
February 16, 2016

Good evening Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today.

My name is Akriti Bhattarai, I am from Wethersfield but attend Glastonbury High School, and I am also currently a member of the Capitol Region Interdistrict Leadership Academy, also known as CRILA.

Being a member of CRILA 12 has been and continues to be one one of the greatest and most valuable experiences in my life. It has offered me skills that I could have never received from anywhere else and has truly changed me as a person and helped me develop as a leader. There are lessons that are difficult to deliver in a traditional classroom, like how to break past your comfort zone and stretch your boundaries, but being a part of CRILA has taught me these skills and many others as well.

I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have received the guidance of Dr. Douglas, Mr. Brodnitzki, Ms. Winer, all the chaperones, and amazing outward bound instructors during trip to the Outward Bound School in Leadville, Colorado. They, and my fellow CRILA 12 students, motivated and encouraged me to try even harder and achieve things I never imagined I would. I completed my first-ever ropes course, went rock climbing at Camp Hale, and reached the top of Homestake peak. Looking out from thirteen thousand feet above sea level to see the remnants of bright white snow on grey rocky peaks above a forest of pine and a glistening lake is an experience I will never forget.

I had no problem being out in the Colorado backcountry and was the first person to embrace going in the woods, but it was a little harder for me to embrace interacting with the rest of the group. I have always been a very reserved and independent person, and at first I was really insecure, awkward, and uncomfortable around my peers. After our week out in Colorado, my fellow CRILA members have become like a second family. Because of CRILA, I am more comfortable interacting with others and using our collective skills and knowledge to accomplish a common goal. Through CRILA, I have also learned to better work with my fellow students and recognize that everybody has some wisdom to offer if you take the time to listen and reflect.

Being a member of CRILA has also made me more comfortable and aware of myself. During the Colorado trip I discovered my strengths and weaknesses as a leader and as a person, and learning how to reflect and learn from my experiences gave me a starting point for improving myself. After facing challenge after challenge, I came to understand that failure is not being unable to complete a task, failure is not trying again. This has helped me to cope better in

school and in my studies and motivated me to figure out where I made a mistake and how I can fix it next time.

Every month, I gain more applicable knowledge and skills in a three-hour CRILA class than I do in an entire seven hour school day. In our leadership workshops we continue to utilize the lessons we have we learned and gain new skills from Mr. Brodnitzki, Ms. Winer, and guest speakers, with the one of our ultimate goals being to give back to the community through a service project. This year while some of our members and I are focused on regaining funding for the program as their service to future bright students, other members are also working to raise funds, awareness, and supplies to package meals that will be donated to the Saint Francis hospital food bank. Our goal is to package five thousand meals as well as donate toiletries and other supplies.

Although my journey in CRILA is far from complete, I have already gained so much confidence and grown as a student and leader. I am able to share my experience with my peers and give them guidance and motivation. Being a part of CRILA is what inspired me to join my high school's peer tutoring club. Six months ago, I could have never stood up here and given a testimony. The very thought would have given me sweats and nightmares. Now, it feels like nothing compared to what I have already accomplished, and I know that my experience as a member of CRILA will continue to positively influence me as I begin to forge my own path and shape my life and community.

Thank you for your attention and I sincerely hope you will consider reinstating the funding for CRILA.